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Abraham Lincoln in Illinois, An Address Delivered to the Pupils of the Palmer School, February 12,1925

LINCOLN ROOM

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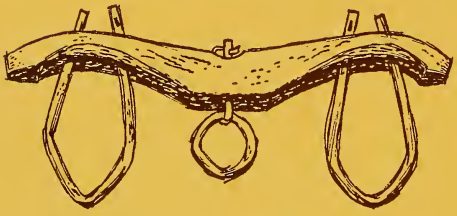

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN ILLINOIS

An address

delivered to the pupils

of the

PALMER SCHOOL

February 12, 1925

by

CHARLES L. QUAINTANCE

Public Relations Department

Central Illinois

Public Service Company

PREFACE

Mr. Charles L. Quaintance was born at Petersburg, Illinois. His boyhood days were filled with pastimes spent in close association with the scenes of New Salem and the Sangamon River now considered historic from Abraham Lincoln's residence there.

Mr. Quaintance fished off the dam at the old mill site and enjoys the priceless heritage of boyhood association with older residents of that community who personally knew and told so much about Lincoln's determined struggle for advancement.

Later as an employee of the Culver Construction Company engaged in rebuilding the Lincoln Monument during the years of 1898 to 1903 additional episodes connected with Lincoln's life and memory were available.

This environment coupled with a study of Lincoln's life and history makes this address particularly worthy of printing and distribution.

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Lincoln Room

ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN ILLINOIS

By *Charles L. Quaintance*

The history of Mr. Lincoln, whose birth we honor today, and Springfield, Illinois, are so closely woven together that the one is not complete without the other, and we who live here amid these historical surroundings are no doubt remiss a great many times in our thoughts of and about them. So today let us go down the aisles of the past, refreshing our memories of some incidents in the great man's life.

Abraham Lincoln's early life was spent in the poorest of surroundings—born in a log cabin in the hills of Kentucky, February 12, 1809. His father could neither read or write. His mother who was a little better educated than the pioneer women of that time, started young Abe to school when seven years old with the only book they had, an old Dillsworth Spelling Book.

Shortly after starting to school the family moved to Indiana and in 1816 when the boy was 8 years old his mother died.

In the latter part of 1819 young Abe's father took his second wife, a Mrs. Johnson. She was a kind stepmother and encouraged the boy to get an education.

It was while living in Indiana that he became interested in law. A friend loaned him the Revised Statutes of Indiana which was the first law book Lincoln ever read and it is said the reading of this book inspired him to become a lawyer.

In 1830 the Lincoln family moved to Illinois, settling in Macon County on the North side of the Sangamon River, about 10 miles West of Decatur.

Abe being of age commenced to shift for himself and in performing some of the odd jobs he was hired to do, it became necessary for him to go to New Salem, a small village or settlement on a bluff on the Sangamon River, about two miles South of what is now Petersburg, Illinois. Here he became a clerk in a grocery store.

Later Lincoln and a dissolute fellow by the name of Berry formed a partnership and went into the grocery business, but they were not successful. They both lived on the stock of merchandise, Berry drinking and Lincoln eating it up. Lincoln during this time was reading every book he could get his hands on.

Then came the Black Hawk War and Lincoln became a Captain of a volunteer company which did a lot of drilling but no fighting. It was during this time that he became acquainted with Major John T. Stewart, a lawyer of Springfield, Illinois, who was an officer in this war. At the conclusion of the Black Hawk War Lincoln became an assistant to John Calhoun, County Surveyor of Sangamon County and he became very proficient in this line. In 1834 he was first elected to the Legislature and again renewed his acquaintance with John T. Stewart, also a member of that body. Mr. Lincoln and Stewart roomed together at Vandalia, the then capitol of the State.

Lincoln counseled with Stewart regarding his studying law and he was advised to start at once. He was then living at New Salem and did his studying in an old house used as a cooper shop where they made barrels, using the shavings from the staves in an open fire place for light to read by, and walking into Springfield, about 20 miles, to borrow law books from Mr. Stewart.

In 1836 Mr. Lincoln was admitted to the bar in Springfield and about the same time he was again elected to the Legislature. It was at this session that the capitol of the State was moved to Springfield. At the close of this session he became a partner with his friend Stewart in the practice of law, and on April 27th the firm of Stewart and Lincoln hung out their shingle.

Springfield was then a mere village, a veritable mud hole. The houses were scattered and poorly constructed. The State House had not been built and the business then centered around a vacant plot of ground where the Court House now stands. The County Court House was a two-story low-ceiling building, the lower floor used for a court room and the Stewart & Lincoln Law Office was on the second floor. This building was located at 109 North Fifth Street. Here Stewart and Lincoln started the practice of law in an

office meagerly furnished—a rough made table, a few chairs, a lounge, a bench and a wood stove to heat the room.

There were no stenographers, typewriters, or duplicating machines, and all legal papers had to be written in long hand—Lincoln doing all the clerical work, sometimes working well into the night and often sleeping on the old rickety lounge, covering himself with a buffalo robe.

The prominence of Mr. Stewart and the efficient aid given the people in securing the Capitol for Springfield, caused the firm's business to grow, but while their cases were numerous, they did not bring in much money, sometimes having to take their fees out in trade.

Here in his plainly furnished office were spent the formative years of Lincoln's legal life. Here he developed that legal logical reasoning of his and power of simple expression which made him an opponent to be feared in Court and a debator of exquisite skill.

The old Wabash Station, now the freight depot, is perhaps surpassed only by Lincoln's Home and Monument in the appeal to those who know the history of Lincoln. Here, on February 11, 1861, Lincoln started on his journey which was destined to be so vital to his country and so filled with tragedy for him.

Lincoln had been a resident of Springfield 24 years, during which time he had risen from the most humble place as a lawyer to the greatest public office in the world. He had endeared himself to hundreds of friends here and on the day of his farewell he suspected and had reason to suspect he would never return.

The Southern States, led on by South Carolina, which formally severed its connection with the Union November 17, 1860, were preparing to dissolve their alliance with the Free States.

Southerners in the Cabinet and Congress conspired to deplete the resources of the Government. The Treasury was deliberately bankrupted. The forts and armaments on the Southern Coast were delivered into the hands of the enemy, with the exception of Fort Sumpter, which was gallantly held by Major Robert Anderson. While this system of bold and unscrupulous treachery was carried on by men in high places

of trust, the chief executive of the Nation remained a passive spectator.

Amidst these potent scenes Lincoln, watching them from Springfield, maintained his calm and vigilant attitude. No one knew better than he the significance of these ominous events that were taking place at the Nation's Capitol. He realized that the time was fast approaching when he would have to take command of the Ship of State, drifting so rapidly into troubled waters.

Upon this mighty task were concentrated all the powers of his mighty intellect and will and through all the desperate voyage that followed he never waivered or faltered in his course to the hour when "From fearful trip the victor ship came in with object won," but with her more than heroic but now victorious captain "fallen cold and dead," upon her deck.

On the morning of February 11, 1861, Lincoln left his home in Springfield for the scene where he was to spend the most anxious, toilsome and painful years of his life. He was accompanied at his departure by his wife, three sons and a party of friends.

"It was a gloomy day; heavy clouds floated overhead, and a cold rain was falling. Long before eight o'clock a great mass of people had collected at the railway station. At precisely five minutes before eight, Mr. Lincoln, preceded by Mr. Wood, emerged from a private room in the depot building, and passed slowly to the car, the people falling back respectfully on either side, and as many as possible shaking his hands. Having reached the train, he ascended the rear platform, and, facing about to the throng which had closed around him, drew himself up to his full height, removed his hat and stood for several seconds in profound silence. His eye roved sadly over that sea of upturned faces, as if asking to read in them the sympathy and friendship which he never needed more than then. There was an unusual quiver in his lip, and a still more unusual tear on his shriveled cheek. His solemn manner, his long silence, were as full of melancholy eloquence as any words he could have uttered. What did he think of? Of the mighty changes which had lifted him from the lowest to the highest estate on earth? Of the weary road which had brought him to this lofty summit? Of his poor mother lying

beneath the tangled underbrush in a distant forest? Of that other grave in the quiet Concord Cemetery? Whatever the character of his thoughts it is evident that they were retrospective and sad. To those who were anxiously waiting to catch his words it seemed long until he had mastered his feelings sufficiently to speak. At length he began, in a husky voice, and slowly and impressively delivered his farewell to his neighbors. Imitating his example many in the crowd stood with heads uncovered in the fast falling rain. Abraham Lincoln spoke none but true and sincere words, and none more true and heartfelt ever fell from his lips than these, so laden with pathos, with humility, with a craving for the sympathy of his friends and the people, and for help above and beyond all earthly power and love.

'My friends:—No one not in my position can realize the sadness I feel at this parting. To this people I owe all that I am. Here I have lived more than a quarter of a century—here my children were born and here one of them lies buried.

I know not how soon I shall see you again. I go to assume a task more difficult than that which has devolved upon any other man since the days of Washington. He never would have succeeded except for the aid of Divine Providence, upon which he at all times relied.

I feel that I cannot succeed without the same Divine blessing which sustained him, and on the same Almighty Being I place my reliance for support and I hope you, my friends, will all pray that I may receive that Divine assistance, without which I cannot succeed, but with which success is certain. Again I bid you an affectionate farewell.' "

After Mr. Lincoln's death he was brought back to his old home here at Springfield and placed in a temporary vault in Oak Ridge Cemetery. After the Monument was built the body was placed in a sarcophagus in the vault on the North side of the Monument, where it rested for a number of years.

Some little time after the death of Mrs. Lincoln, an opening was made in the floor of the vault large enough for the two caskets to rest side by side. This opening was about six feet deep. After the caskets

were lowered into place, the space above them was filled in with concrete.

In 1898 it was found that a part of the foundation of the Monument was giving way. It was decided to rebuild and add 18 feet to its height. A new foundation had to be put in.

The caskets of Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln were dug out of the concrete and placed in a temporary vault. When the work of the Monument was completed and they were ready to return them to their final resting place, the change was made late in the night. A number of high ranking men in the State Government were there. The question arose as to whether Mr. Lincoln's body was in the casket. In order to make sure the casket was opened and I have what followed from a man who was one of the party that looked into the face of the martyred President. Death and time had changed the features but little, only a bit of mold on the black tie and lapel of the coat showed the ravages of the grave.

The casket was closed and placed beside his wife in the opening prepared for them. This opening was filled in with solid concrete and is located directly under the sarcophagus that you see as you look through the iron gate that leads into the North Room of the Monument.

And here we must leave the body of this great man but his soul lives on in the hearts of the American people and will live to the last syllable of recorded time, and the great life and love he gave to the world will be an inspiration and his memory a benediction.

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